WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Violence is a *Process*

- Targeted violence is the result of an understandable process of thinking and behavior
- Violence is the culmination of multiple factors that reflect problems, conflicts, disputes and failures
- Violence stems from an interaction between the potential attacker, past stressful events, a current situation, and the target
- The subject will display “attack-related” behaviors that move along a continuum of idea to action, including thinking, planning, and logistical preparation
  - Fein & Vossekuil (1998)

Myths about Workplace Violence

Myth: Violent employees just "snap"

Reality: The violent act is the final action in an often long and drawn out conflict

Reality: Attacks are thought about and planned over time

Myths about Workplace Violence

Myth: Violent employees strike without warning or clues

Reality: Potentially dangerous individuals present multiple clues to multiple people

Reality: Clues are not reported to appropriate individuals or entities

Reality: Clues are verbal statements, aggressive behaviors, obsessions, bizarre statements or actions

Myths About Workplace Violence

Myth: Individuals are either dangerous or not dangerous

Reality: Individuals fall along a continuum of violence risk that can increase and decrease over time

Myths about Workplace Violence

Myth: The workplace violence problem is all about homicide

Reality: The workplace violence problem is less about homicide and more about assaults, intimidation, and fear in the workplace which occur far more frequently

Myths about Workplace Violence

Myth: Even if you can identify violent employees, nothing can be done

Reality: Team management works

- Achieve team agreement on a management plan
- Implement consistent communications to concerning employee
- Set and maintain clear boundaries for concerning employee

Workplace Violence: Legal Issues

- Organizations have a “duty to provide a safe work environment” per the general duty clause (Fed-OSHA, 1970)
- Revised guidelines for workplace security now require that programs be in place to address workplace violence (OSHA, Division of Occupational Safety and Health, 1994/95)

How Can Workplace Violence Manifest Itself?

- Threats (verbal/nonverbal/written)
- Violent Gestures/Intimidation
- Harassment
- Espionage
- Violent Acts at the Job Site
- Stalking
- Domestic Violence (Individuals will come to the workplace to “get at” their spouse/partner. Others become”collateral damage”)

Workplace Violence: Warning Signs

Verbal Clues:

- Direct and indirect threats
- Threatening/harassing phone calls
- Recurrent suicide threats or actions
- Hopelessness
- Boasts of violent behavior or fantasies
- Frequent profanity
- Belligerence
- Challenging or intimidating statements

Workplace Violence: Warning Signs

Physical Clues:

- Physical altercation/assault upon another person
- Inappropriate weapon possession or use
- Physical intimidation
- Following and surveilling targeted individuals
- Short-fused, loss of emotional control
- Destruction of property
- Deteriorating physical appearance and self-care
- Inappropriate displays of emotion
- Isolation and withdrawing
- Signs or history of substance use/abuse

Workplace Violence: Warning Signs

Obsessions:

- Self as victim of a particular individual
- Grudges and deep resentments
- Particular object of desire
- Perceived injustices, humiliations, disrespect
- Narrow focus- “sees no way out”
- Publicized acts of violence
- Weapons and destruction
- Perceived unfairness
- Grievances and lawsuits

Non-Verbal Communications Seen In Violent Individuals

- Certain non-verbal communications should be a matter of concern in the presence of these characteristics:
  - Exaggerated gestures
  - Shallow or rapid breathing
  - Clenched jaws or fists, pacing nervously
  - Sweating, shaking, trembling, red face
  - Staring intently or avoiding eye contact

Signs of Diminished Attitude

- Increased frequency of aggressive acts or veiled/conditional threats
- Signs of impairment by drugs or alcohol
- Withdrawn, shows little initiative
- Deteriorating or strained relationships with co-workers
- Uncooperative or defensive; blames others for problems

Signs of Diminished Attitude

- Difficulty in concentrating; lacks enthusiasm
- Increased forgetfulness
- Increasingly withdrawn from co-workers and friends
- Irritable or depressed

The Path to Violence

- Individual experiences an event which creates extreme tension or anxiety:
  - Single major event (layoff or termination; actual or *perceived*)
  - Cumulative minor events
- Individual perceives that problems are essentially unsolvable
- Individual projects all responsibility onto the situation
- Violence is perceived as the only solution to the problem
- Individual prepares for the violent act
- Violent act is attempted or committ

What can employees do?

All indicators of potential violence in the workplace should be immediately brought to the attention of appropriate supervisors, human resources and/or security

DOCUMENT

- All interactions with the subject
- All reports on the subject
- Save all voicemails, emails, phone logs, other forms of communication, & documents

What can management do?

What Can Management Do?

- Develop a workplace violence prevention policy
- Create and disseminate a policy to mangers and employees that expressly disapproves of workplace violence, verbal and nonverbal threats, and related actions
- Take all violent and threatening incidents seriously, investigate them and contact NCIS when warratnted; take appropriate corrective action
- Outline a comprehensive plan for maintaining security in the workplace
- Provide necessary authority and resources for staff to carry out violence prevention responsibilities

What Can Management Do?

- Hold managers and employees accountable for their performance
- Institute procedures for prompt reporting and tracking of violent incidents that occur in and near the workplace
- Ensure that employees who report or experience workplace violence are not punished or otherwise suffer discrimination
- Work constructively with other parties such local police, human resources, legal, public safety agencies to improve the security of all personnel

Resources

- www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence
- www.workplaceviolence911.com

Conclusions

If command has concern about an employee:

- Contact your local NCIS office
- Consider Employee Assistance Program
  - Have employee sign waiver so command may have access to EAP records
- Document & appropriately address all incidents